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A SERMON,

BY THE

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THE following DISCOURSE was written very hurriedly, during a few hours of leisure snatched from other public duties, and without any idea of its being published, but, as its publication has been requested by the Society, the Author has complied with this request, in the hope that, by the blessing of God it may be made useful.

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A SERMON:

THE DUTY OF DILIGENTLY ADDING TO OUR FAITH, THE GRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

2 Peter, I. ch., 5, 6, 7, vss. "And, besides this, giving all diligence add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.

The circumstances, my Brethren, in which we are now met are of a peculiar kind, met as we are as the natives of a common Country, the Members of a Charitable Society, for the purpose of engaging in a religious service. As such it is peculiarly becoming for us so to do. We are met as the natives of a Country endeared to us by many associations. It is endeared to us, as the land of our fathers,—the land of our birth,—the land of many of our friends, and of the companions of our earlier years. As the Englishman delights to look back to the rich fields of merry England, so Scotland is endeared to us by the recollection of those scenes with which our boyhood, and the riper age of some among us were familiar, its lofty mountains, its highland lakes and glens, its green hills, its pleasant vales and silvery streams, each linked with many a tale of former days. It is endeared to us,as the land of freedom, and now reposing under a political constitution the wisest and the best which the world ever saw. It is endeared to us, as a land, where the benefits of education, here yet but very partially known, are universally diffused,—of a system of Education, the glory and the blessing of our Country, which has produced many illustrious names, familiar as household words in the different walks of learning, and to which as a means thousands of Scotia's Sons have owed their advancement, and success in distant climes,—an education which is yet rapidly rising to yet higher attainments, in every

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department of literature and art, and of theoretical and practical science. This however is not all. Knowledge indeed is power. But whether it be a power for good, or for evil, depends on its being employed for the one purpose, or the other. And one great reason why Scotland, small as it is among the nations, has exerted, and still, we may without boasting say, exerts so mighty a power for good, is just because her sons have received a superior Education, under the direction of religious principle. It is endeared to us above all, to whatever portion of the Visible Church we may have there belonged, as the land where the tree of life is found planted beside the tree of knowledge—of the Church as well as of the University and the School,—where we have been privileged to enjoy the inestimable blessings of religious, as well as intellectual, instruction. Surely then it well becomes us, on a day of annual remembrance like this, solemnly to unite in thankfulness to God, for having, in His providence, cast our lot in our youth in such a land, to offer up our humble supplications, that He would enable us to shew by our lives, by works of faith and labours of love, our gratitude for the benefits which He has thus conferred, and to seek to derive from His holy Word those lessons by which we may be guided in the performance of this duty. And surely it well becomes us to live, and to act, as the children of so many mercies ought to do.

It has sometimes been objected, not certainly by those best qualified to form an impartial judgment, that the religion of Scotland is rather doctrinal than practical,—more of the head and of the lip, than of the heart and of the life. This objection, it might be shewn, arises in general from a difference in religious views, and from imperfect acquaintance with the subject, but the best answer to the objection is the practical one, that no where perhaps is there to be found a more moral population. In like manner it is for us as Scotsmen, my Brethren, in our heart, and in our actions, in all the outward circumstances in which we may be placed, and with all the outward advantages which God has given, to endeavour, by the blessing of God, to maintain a high standard of religion, and morality in this the land of our adoption. Surely to us are peculiarly applicable the words of the aged Joshua, when about to go the way of all the earth, who calling unto him the elders

of the people of Israel, and recounting to them the benefits which the Lord had conferred on them, thus exhorted them, "Now *therefore* fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth." Surely to us is peculiarly applicable the exhortation of the Apostle in our Text, "And besides this" (or rather, for such is the meaning of the expression), "*on this very account*, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." The Apostle, after, in the preceding verses of this Epistle, praying for grace and peace from God to his Christian brethren, first directs their minds to the grace of God, by His Holy Spirit, as the only effectual source of their conversion, impressing as it did on their hearts and minds the knowledge of Christ, and the precious promises of His Gospel, and causing them to fulfil the end which these were intended, as well as fitted to accomplish, —that is, that they might be delivered from sin, and made partakers of the divine nature; and then he takes occasion, in the words before us, to exhort those to whom he wrote, in the use of every means in the pursuit of the same end, to work out their own salvation with fear, and trembling, because it is God who hath wrought, and still worketh in them to will, and to do, and giving all diligence, to make their calling and election sure.— Even so, since God thus calls us by his grace, and has bestowed on us so many inestimable blessings, in that land which we still delight to call by the endearing name of Home, we ought, all the more, to give all diligence to add to our faith every Christian grace.

Let us then consider, in the *first* place, the *several practical duties* to which we are here called; and *next*, the *manner in which they ought to be performed*, "Giving all diligence."

Christian faith is not a dead and inoperative, but a living and active principle. Though we are saved by faith *alone*, we are not saved by a faith *which is alone*, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but *faith which worketh by love*." From that which is, in these words, declared to be the all in all of Christianity, we learn the inseparable connexion between Christian faith, and Christian practice. And how miserably would we deceive ourselves, if we

for a moment conceived of it as unconnected with a clean heart, and a holy life. Let us give earnest heed, therefore, to the exhortation of our Text.

1. Let it be our endeavor to add, in the *first* place, to our faith "*virtue.*" This term, in the original, denotes chiefly *active virtue*,—every virtuous and excellent *deed*, in conformity with that law which God has written on our hearts, and authoritatively set forth in His word. The other duties to which we are called, in the words that follow, relate to our *inward* views and dispositions, this to our *outward* life and conduct. And we have much need to bear continually in mind this injunction, for, however men may wear the form of godliness without its power, it is impossible for any to have its power without both its form, and its actions. "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit." Without holy and virtuous deeds also, the benefits of a godly example, unspeakably important as they are, would be altogether unfelt. Let our light, therefore, so shine before men that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven.—Both in speech, and in behaviour let us exhibit reverence towards God, and his Law, respect and submission to constituted authorities, dutifulness in all the private relations of life, justice and truth in our dealings with our fellow men, and courtesy, and kindness, and beneficence towards all. "Deliver the oppressed, help the fatherless, defend the widow; break thy bread to the hungry," and let the needy, and the wayfaring man be the object of thy care. Not the smallest of these works of faith, not a cup of cold water, will lose a gracious recompense, and, even here, you will find in your own happy experience, that in the keeping of God's commandments, there is not only a future, but a present and great reward.

2. But we are to add, at the same time, to virtue "*knowledge.*" We are to add to our faith not only the righteous actions of the life, but the views of an enlightened mind, and the habits and dispositions of a renewed, and understanding heart,—the fountain, from which only all holy and virtuous deeds can flow. And *first*, in the constellation of graces which the Apostle proceeds to enumerate, is "knowledge," not that knowledge which puffeth up, but that heavenly knowledge which is learned in the school of Christ, right ideas, and judgments, and reasonings regarding divine things, conceiving in some measure aright of

the infinite nature, and perfections of God, an intelligent acquaintance with our own real state, and what the Gospel reveals, and requires, and a Christian wisdom, and discretion, in the application of what it contains to the circumstances in which we are placed, and in which we act. The importance of a right understanding of the objects of faith can scarcely be too highly estimated. If we know not the glorious nature, and works, and ways of God, how can we possibly think of Him, and feel towards Him, and serve Him as we ought? If we have only vague, or mistaken notions of the way of salvation which His Word proclaims, how can we expect, that we should experience its saving and sanctifying power? How, without knowledge, can we be said to believe at all, in the proper sense of that term? We must, first, understand the meaning of what we affirm that we believe; otherwise, although still termed by us belief, it is not the belief of the truth as it is in Jesus. Let us seek, not only, to have the knowledge of these things, but to *grow* in the *knowledge* of them. For while the declarations of the Gospel are, in their main features, simple, and level to the apprehension of the meanest capacity, and such that he who runs may read, they are at the same time sublime, in their import, beyond the most exalted conceptions of the highest intelligence.

3. *Another* grace specified by the Apostle, as requisite to be added to our faith, is *temperance*. By this, is not meant a refraining from excess merely of one particular kind, but of all kinds whatever. The *temperance* of Christianity implies in it moderation in *all* things, even those which are lawful, and innocent in themselves. This is evident from the meaning of the original word, which is *mastery*,—the mastery over the world, the devil and the flesh,—the greatest of all conquests, which none but the true disciple of Christ can attain. The want of a proper rule over our spirits, and carrying beyond their due bounds passions, and inclinations right and becoming in themselves, is the source of many of the sins of men. Thus a proper industry, and economy are degraded into covetousness, the lawful desire for pleasure is debased into sensualism, the love of knowledge gives place to an insatiable craving after an unprofitable, and falsely called learning, patriotism degenerates into a vain ambition, and thirst after a merely popular applause, the natural appetites, which

prompt us to provide for the sustenance of our bodies, are perverted from their legitimate ends, and resentment for wrongs, when carried to excess, leads to hatred, and malice, to deeds of bloodshed and revenge. In the moderation of our passions and affections, therefore, a great part of true religion consists. Then and then only, my Brethren, when you have been made Masters of your own spirits, and we trust that of such among you there are not a few,—when conscience as the vicegerent of God within the breast and acting according to His Law, has been restored to its rightful sway, will you be not slaves, but free indeed, and possessed of a moral and intellectual dignity which you can never otherwise attain.

4. But we are, farther, called to add to temperance "*patience.*" The early Christians to whom the Apostle wrote, were subjected to many persecutions, and they are, therefore, here specially called upon to exercise a meek, and patient endurance of these sufferings, still holding fast, amid their fiery trials, the profession of their faith without wavering, and abiding constant and immoveable in their Christian hope, and love. But the patience to which our Text exhorts us includes in it, also, a patient submission to every affliction. When the stream of life flows smoothly on, and nothing presents itself to disturb our equanimity, no defect in our Christian character may be perceived, but, if we be exposed to the frowns and sneers of an evil world, it may be, we either rise into resentment, or resign ourselves to a sinful acquiescence. Or, if we be exposed to sickness, or bereavement, or sorrow, or pain, or any of those ills which are the common lot of all in this fallen and mortal state, it may be, we either give way to peevish discontent, or sink into despondency or despair. But let it not be so with any of us. Let us so endure whatsoever trial God may be pleased to send, as most to manifest the faith and patience of His people, and reap the fruits of sanctified affliction. Whatever he does is right, and therefore every repining ought to be hushed. His will ought to be our will, and whatsoever has seemed good to Him ought to be deemed so by us. He may have laid upon us His afflicting hand, but we can never repay the debt of gratitude which we owe to Him for what of His goodness we have received in time past, and for what is still left. He has led us and fed us all our lives long, and bestowed on us innumerable blessings,

spiritual and temporal. How manifold are the benefits which He has conferred, and is still conferring on us! And O forbid, that, sinful and undeserving as we are, we should complain under any affliction, which he may see meet to mingle in our cup, and even which also, if we be duly exercised thereby, He sends in mercy. Let it rather be our earnest desire, and endeavor, to profit by all His dispensations, that they may be accompanied by the teaching of His Word and Spirit, may be the means of producing in us more realizing impressions of divine and eternal things, more humbling views of ourselves, a closer cleaving to Christ, and a more watchful, and prayerful obedience for the time to come.

5. But, having urged upon us a proper control over our passions and inclinations, and a patient resignation to all the dispensations of the providence of God, we are farther enjoined to add to patience "*godliness;*" that is, a regard to God in all the thoughts and feelings of our souls, and all the actions of our lives,—that love and fear of Him, and delight in Him, which will effectually dispose us to the performance of every duty, and which are the fulfilling of the law. So important is this grace of *piety*, to which we are here called, that it in fact involves in it the whole of true religion. Timothy, therefore, is exhorted by St. Paul to "exercise himself unto *godliness*," and it is declared, that "*godliness* is profitable unto all things, having the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." By it, we are taught, at once to take, as our guide in all our ways, His holy, and just, and good Law,—the perfect, and unchangeable standard of rectitude; and, at the same time, to keep all His commandments from a regard to Him, as our only Creator, our only Preserver, and Benefactor, our only Lawgiver and Judge, our only Redeemer, and our only Happiness. No sentiments, or dispositions, or actions can be properly called *good*, when not prompted mainly by a regard to God. Man alone, of all His creation here below, has been formed with the capacity of knowing, and loving, and intelligently serving Him. This is our highest privilege and distinction, as it must be the highest privilege and distinction of any created being. God has paramount claims on our reverence, gratitude, obedience, trust, and devout admiration, and affection;—claims, to which the claims of all others are as nothing in comparison, and he who is not actuated by a supreme

regard to Him cannot be possessed of a true faith. But, if we walk before God in the light of the living, not with eye service, as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord, this will be our surest guide throughout life, and, even as the sun falling on the drops of dew gives them a splendour, and a beauty not their own, so will this regard to Him consecrate and ennoble the very meanest, and most ordinary of your transactions.

6. Next in importance to our duty to *God*, and to *ourselves*, to which the precepts already mentioned are mainly to be referred, is our duty to our *fellow-men*, and specially to those who are of the *household of faith*. Add, therefore, it is said, to godliness "*brotherly kindness*." This duty implies in it, that we love our Christian brethren out of a pure heart fervently, that we exhort, encourage, and pray for one another in our Christian course, that we meekly submit ourselves to each others just reproofs, that we bear each others burdens, and sympathize with each others afflictions, conducting ourselves to our fellow Christians with kindness, and hospitality, with meekness and forbearance, "laying aside all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envyings, and evil speakings," and distributing to the necessities of such of our fellow believers as may be in circumstances of destitution, or of distress. Love to the brethren is the distinguishing mark of the sincere follower of Christ. "By this," said our Lord, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, because ye have love one to another." "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." "We know," saith St. John, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Abundant arguments and motives, my Brethren, present themselves for the cultivation of a spirit of Christian fellowship, and love, and happy would be the results, if this spirit were more fully and universally felt, and exercised! If we are indeed of the number of those who have passed from death unto life, with what strong affection ought our hearts to yearn towards all those who truly love the Lord Jesus, who have been redeemed by the same Saviour, and towards whom He is still continuing to manifest the riches of His grace and love, who are members together with us of His one body, who have the same God, the same

faith and hope,—who are journeying in the same path to an incorruptible inheritance, and are professing to be seeking that everlasting country, even an heavenly, where all questions regarding forms and unessential points, by which Christians are now distracted and divided, will be at an end, and conclusively set at rest, and all who are one in Christ Jesus will be united in one loving, and holy brotherhood! Surely, then, we have every reason, among those things which are to be added to our faith, to add "brotherly kindness."

7. Once more, we are to add to affection, and kindness to our brethren in Christ, love to all our fellow-men, "and to brotherly kindness, *charity*." The word translated "*charity*" here, as in 1st Cor. 13th ch. and in other passages of Scripture, means, as is well known, "love," and ought to have been so translated for the purpose of greater perspicuity, and in order to guard against mistakes. It is not, therefore, to be taken in the ordinary sense of the term in common language, as applied merely to acts of beneficence to the needy. This is but one, and though an important one, by no means the highest exercise of the divine principle of Christian love to men. Upon its various attractive features, so beautifully set before us by the inspired Apostle of the Gentiles, in the chapter of the Epistle just referred to, we cannot now dwell. Suffice it to say, Christian charity, or love, extends itself to all, even to enemies. Heaven descended, she eyes at one glance the whole breadth of the earth, and looks with the same benign countenance upon all its unnumbered millions, as alike children of the same Almighty and merciful Father. And the measure of this love which we are to cherish, and to display towards man, as man, is that love which we are required by the strongest motives to bear towards ourselves. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor *as thyself*." This is a high standard, it is true, for our Christian charity, but it is the standard at the attainment of which we are to aim, and we may remark, that it is one which we can distinctly and easily understand, and apply; while, at the same time, it completely refutes the charge which has sometimes been brought against love to ourselves, by those who have confounded love to ourselves with selfishness. Laying out of view at present the other, and important exercises of this, the grand social principle of the Gospel, it is easy to see the bearing of

Christian love on the many, and various necessities of our fellow-men. We are taught by it, or rather by Him by whom it was first proclaimed, that man is every where the neighbour of man. We are taught by it to take a deep interest in every philanthropic enterprize for the benefit of our fellow countrymen, whether from Great Britain, or the Sister Isle, scattered over this land, or of any of our brethren of mankind, and to help it forward, in so far as it may be in our power; to give our mite for the alleviation of famine, or sudden and overwhelming calamities, or the disasters of wide-spreading disease, whether in our own, or in neighboring lands; but above all, in our own more immediate sphere, to do good both to the souls and to the bodies of our fellow men.—by precept and example, by our alms,and by our prayers;—to pluck those that are ready to perish, as brands from the burning, to visit the sick in their affiiction, to pour into the wounded spirit the healing balm of christian consolation, and to minister to the wants of the poor and needy. Your destitute fellow countrymen, my Brethren, whom you have aided in this distant land, far from the home of their sires, cannot recompense you, but every such act, performed in the spirit of christian love, meets with the approval of your heavenly Father, and will receive the recompense of reward at His hands. "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that which he hath given will He pay him again."

Secondly, and in conclusion, my Brethren, it only remains, brieflyto consider the *manner* in which we are to fulfil the precept here given. "*Giving all diligence*," add to your faith virtue, and all other christian graces.The attainment of these,along with faith itself, forms an aim which ought to be common to all, and in the prosecution of which, every one ought to be sedulously engaged with all diligence, as his chief business and concern. In subordination to the principal business of life, other objects may be lawfully pursued, and many are the aims towards which we severally direct our labors, and which we are bound to follow. But this is the object that ought to engage our main endeavours, which we ought to regard as most excellent, and to seek after as our best portion, and which alone brings with it real, and permanent happiness. Then shall we "lay up for ourselves treasures in

heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal." Here the honours and pleasures of time wither in our grasp, our garments are motheaten, and riches take unto themselves wings and fly away, but the treasures, and happiness of heaven are unfading and eternal. And yet are any among us, uninterruptedly, and with scarcely any other thought or employment, busied with merely worldly avocations, and never seriously, and zealously labouring after that bread which nourisheth the soul unto everlasting life ? Surely, my friends, we do not imagine, that heaven is to be gained by a few short steps, and that while the most toilsome and unwearied efforts are put forth for worldly wealth, or worldly honours, the eternal dignity, and felicity of the saints in light are so little esteemed as not to require to be diligently, and steadfastly pursued, the exercise of our constant endeavors, and the use of every means placed within our power. To the most pious Christians even, what a wide field of advancement and high improvement here lies before them ! so that the holy Apostle counted not himself to have attained, either to be already perfect, but this one thing he did, " forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth unto those things which were before, he pressed towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Let as many, therefore, as be perfect, be thus minded, still pressing towards the mark, and giving all diligence to make their calling and election sure.

We know not, my Brethren, upon what sudden, or unforeseen occasions we may be stretched on beds of languishing, or of death,—how soon we may be taken out of this busy world, and laid in the silent tomb. There the eye is for ever closed upon the scenes and lessons of time ; the ear is for ever shut to the invitations of redeeming mercy here held out to all ; the hand is powerless that may now be stretched forth in deeds of piety and beneficence, and no sound of penitence, gratitude, or entreaty, thence ascends from earth to heaven. Let us walk therefore, while we have the light, lest darkness come upon us. " Whatsoever your hands find to do, that do with all your might. While God is thus gracious, and worketh in you to will, and to do, be ye fellow workers with Him, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, in the diligent use of every appointed means, and the practice of all the duties of the Christian life.

Thus will ye know, that ye are indeed of the number of the redeemed of the Lord, because ye are neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and thus will an abundant and happy entrance be ministered to you at last into His everlasting kingdom.